National Agenda

for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities

A
Parent
Perspective

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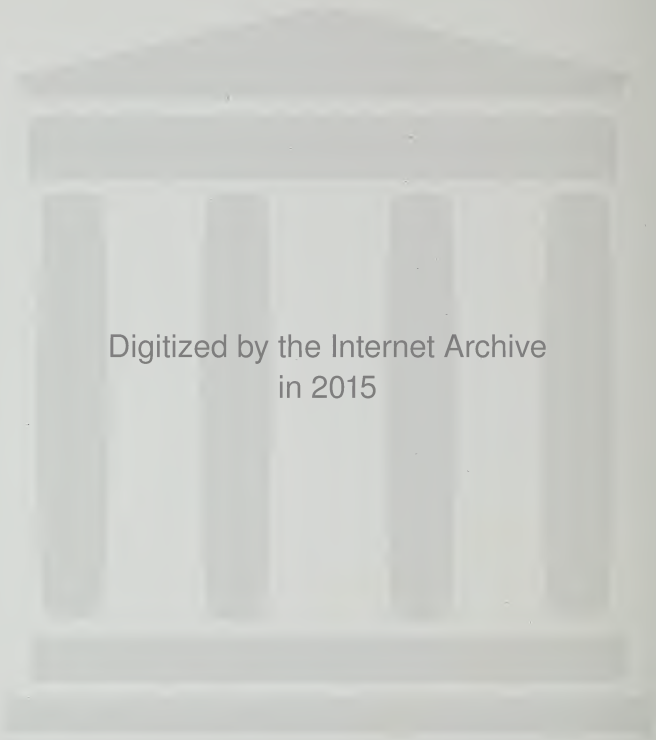
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The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities…A Parent Perspective

Summer 2002

NATIONAL AGENDA
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What is the *National Agenda*?

The *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* (Corn, Hatlen, Huebner, Ryan, Siller, 1995) is a grassroots effort to change the way visually impaired and blind children are being educated. Even with IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) the fact remains that children with visual impairments do not always learn enough in school to get a job or live independently after graduation.

The *National Agenda* is the result of parents, teachers, and administrators working as partners to make changes for students with visual impairments. These partners have looked at the most important things needed to make education better for visually impaired and blind children. These things make up the eight goals of the *National Agenda.* We believe that working toward these goals can make a difference in the lives of students with visual impairments.

Why is the *National Agenda* important to parents of students with visual impairments or blindness?

The *National Agenda* is important because sometimes months or years go by before someone, usually a parent or teacher, realizes that a child can't

see well. More time may go by before the child receives the kinds of services that are needed to learn well. Children with blindness or visual impairments may receive an inferior education because there are not enough teachers and specialists who can meet their special needs. Often children with visual impairments are placed in schools or classrooms that are not right for them, without thought to where the child might learn best.

As parents, we believe using the *National Agenda* will help our children learn what they need to know to be successful. When parents, teachers, and school administrators use the *National Agenda* and its eight goals, blind and visually impaired children will receive an appropriate education.

The eight goals of the *National Agenda*, followed by questions parents may want to ask themselves, follow. *Although some answers are included, ours is not an inclusive list and you and your family may want to consult local resources for additional information.*

Goal 1: Students and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment.

- If you have a young child (birth through age 5) have you been referred to an educational program?
- Were you given a range of choices regarding placement options?

New Parents *– If answer is no to either question, you may want to contact your State Department of Special Education Early Intervention Services (EIS)…make a note of the telephone number below:*

⇒ _____

Experienced parents *– You may want to advocate on behalf of other parents and their children for early intervention services or simply breathe a sigh of relief that you no longer need worry about this point.*

Goal 2: Policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure the right of all parents to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.

- Did you receive information about parent involvement from professionals working with your child?
- Do you feel that you are an equal partner in the formal educational process as it applies to your child? If not, what would you do to change that? What would have to change in the system?

- Were you given information about resources outside of the special education system such as parent support groups, consumer advocacy organizations, and so forth? If not, please see resources at the end of this document.

In the formal educational process (i.e., during IEP meetings, transition planning, etc.) equal partnership roles may change as the child gets older – with younger children, parents are more directly involved, with older students, the student becomes the partner).

In order to be a full and equal partner in the formal education process, parents must be involved in the entirety of the educational process from initial assessment and planning through implementation and continuing assessment.

Goal 3: Universities, with a minimum of one full-time faculty member in the area of visual impairment, will prepare a sufficient number of educators of students with visual impairments to meet personnel needs throughout the country.

- Are you aware of the critical shortage of Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility Instructors throughout the country?
- Does your state have a college or university program that prepares Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Orientation & Mobility Instructors?

- Does your school district hire ***certified*** Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and Orientation & Mobility Specialists (COMS)?

You can help address this critical shortage – please contact your state National Agenda Coordinator or state parent organization, addressing the needs of children with visual impairments.

Goal 4: Service providers will determine caseloads based on the needs of students and will require ongoing professional development for all teachers and orientation and mobility instructors.

- Do you feel your child receives disability-specific services from a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and/or a Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) frequently enough?
- How many students does your child's Teacher of the Visually Impaired have to teach?
- How many students does your child's O&M Instructor have to teach?
- Is there a limit on how many children your child's teachers have?

Goal 5: Local education programs will ensure that all students have access to a full array of placement options.

- Did you receive information from your child's current school about alternative placement options available to you? Do you know the pros and cons of each?
- Do you feel that your child can enroll in the placement option you feel is most appropriate?
- Do you feel you can change the placement option according to the educational needs of your child as he or she gets older?

Goal 6: Assessment of students will be conducted, in collaboration with parents, by personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.

- Have school district personnel assessed your child? Did the assessment team have experience with children like yours?
- Were *you* involved in the assessment process?
- Does your State have resources for assessment or have staff experienced in assessing students with visual impairments including those with multiple disabilities?

Assessment includes: 1) initial assessments to determine eligibility for special education services, 2) assessments to determine specific services, 3) routine classroom assessments (including Braille proficiency, speed of Braille reading, use of the abacus, etc.), and 4) standardized testing.

Goal 7: Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.

- Does your child receive his or her textbooks and instructional materials in the appropriate medium, for example, in Braille or large print?
- Does your child receive his or her textbooks and instructional materials at the same time as sighted peers?
- Does your child have the correct adaptive equipment, for example, closed circuit television set (CCTV), computer with speech or enlarged print, or adaptive software, tactile measuring devices, manipulative and accessible science equipment, etc. to participate fully in classes?

You may need to advocate for both textbooks and instructional materials, including assistive technology such as electronic note takers or speech access to the Internet for your child.

Goal 8: Educational and developmental goals, including instruction, will reflect the assessed needs of each student in all areas of academic and disability-specific core curricula.

- Do you feel your child's school program addresses his or her disability-specific needs (for example, use of low vision devices, Braille, O&M, assistive technology, instruction in sign language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social skills, activities of daily living, career education)?
- Does your district, region or state mandate that children with visual impairments receive instruction in disability-specific skills as well as standard academic content?
- Have you heard of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments and do you use it when developing your child's IEP goals?

Although the *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Impairments* currently contains only the eight goals reviewed above, many parents and professionals believe another goal concerning the importance of **Transition Services** needs to also be considered. In some states, the local stakeholders have added such a goal to their state agendas. This is certainly an option in your state if you and other parents and professionals believe it can strengthen your efforts on behalf of students with visual impairments.

The critical importance of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments

*The expanded core curriculum (*Hatlen, 1996) is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments because of their unique disability-specific needs. Students with visual impairments need the expanded core curriculum (see below) in addition to the core academic curriculum of general education.

Core Academic Curriculum

- English language arts
- Other languages to the extent possible
- Mathematics
- Health
- Science
- Physical education
- Social studies
- History
- Economics
- Business education
- Fine arts
- Vocational education

Expanded Core Curriculum

- Compensatory academic skills, including communication modes
- Orientation and mobility
- Social interaction skills
- Independent living skills
- Recreation and leisure skills

- Career education
- Use of assistive technology
- Visual efficiency skills

Compensatory or functional academic skills include learning experiences such as concept development and spatial awareness, organizational skills, using braille or low vision devices to read and write, using alternative communication systems such as sign language or the use of calendar systems, using recorded materials, and so forth.

Orientation and Mobility training focuses on alternatives to using sight for safe and independent travel purposes. In this instructional area, children are taught the use of the long cane and techniques for using any remaining vision that they may have such as the use of optical devices such as telescopes or monoculars.

Social interaction skills must be taught to children with visual impairments because they are unable to casually observe how people interact and socialize with one another. They must be taught when and how to smile, frown, nod, wink, shrug, and the many other nonverbal communication skills.

Independent living skills are the chores people perform, according to their abilities, which enable them to manage their homes and personal lives. These chores include grooming, eating and preparing

meals, taking care of household chores, money and time management, and so forth.

Recreation and leisure skills may include traditional as well as adapted physical education activities. However, as with social interaction skills visually impaired children need help identifying the array of choices available to them in this area and must be taught how to perform leisure skills that most children learn through observation.

Career education for students with visual impairments needs to begin as early as possible and include self-awareness and career exploration activities, job seeking skills instruction, information about job keeping, and encourage opportunities for gaining work experience.

Instruction in the use and maintenance of assistive technology is needed in the curriculum for students with visual impairments. Assistive technology enables blind and visually students to access and store information from libraries around the world and the Internet. In addition, students with visual impairments can use assistive technology for notetaking, studying for tests, research and a variety of other academic uses.

Visual efficiency skills are those skills that children with impaired, but good remaining vision use to make the most use of their remaining sight.

Instruction in this area may focus on the use of optical devices such as magnifiers, bioptic aids, telescopes, closed circuit televisions, and so forth.

How can the *National Agenda* impact the lives of you, your family, and your child?

Knowledge is power. With the knowledge that parents and professionals from all over the United States developed and support the eight goals of the National Agenda, you can use them as tools when working with your child, in your district, with school administrators, teachers and support staff to guarantee that your child's educational program meets his or her needs. The eight goals of the *National Agenda* provide guidelines to consider for your child's successful educational outcomes.

Some of the goals may not seem related to your child or your situation. However, consider this example. Your child is blind and needs Braille instruction; the district cannot provide a teacher of the visually impaired because although they have advertised, they are having difficulty finding a certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired. Goal 3 is Teacher Preparation; this does affect you, your child and your situation because your child is not receiving services. Perhaps in the larger picture you can affect change for your child by bringing this issue to your state representatives and senators, or your State Board of Education (SBOE).

References

Corn, A. L., Hatlen, P., Huebner, K. M., Ryan, F., Siller, M. A. (1995). *The national agenda for the education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities.* NY: American Foundation for the Blind.

Hatlen, P. (1996). The core curriculum for blind and visually impaired students, including those with additional disabilities. *RE:view 28*, 25-32.

Notes:

Acronyms of Interest to Parents

ACB	American Council of the Blind
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AER	Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
AFB	American Foundation for the Blind
APH	American Printing House for the Blind
AT	Assistive Technology
CEC	Council for Exceptional Children
COMS	Certified O&M Specialist
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FERPA	Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Services Plan
ILS	Independent Living Skills (AKA ADL & DLS)
ISD	Independent School District
ITP	Individualized Transition Plan
LEA	Local Education Agency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
NAPVI	National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired
NFB	National Federation of the Blind
NLS	National Library Service
NOPBC	National Organization of Parents of Blind Children
O&M	Orientation & Mobility
OSEP	Office of Special Education Policy
OT	Occupational Therapy
P&A	Protection & Advocacy

Para	Paraprofessional (aide)
PAC	Parent Advisory Council
PT	Physical Therapy
RFB&D	Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic
SEA	State Education Agency
S&L	Speech & Language
	Section 504
SSA	Social Security Administration
TCVI	Teacher Consultant for the Visually Impaired (see TVI)
TVI	Teacher of the Visually Impaired (see TCVI)
VRC	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
VRT	Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher

Resource List

American Council of the Blind (ACB)
Council of Families with Visual Impairments
1515 15th Street N.W. Suite 720
Washington, DC 2005
(800) 424-8666
(202) 467-5081
Fax (202) 467-5085
URL: http://www.acb.org

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)
11 Penn Plaza
Suite 300
New York, NY 10001
(800) 232-5463
(212) 502-7600
URL: http://www.afb.org

American Printing House for the Blind (APH)
1839 Frankfort Avenue
Louisville, KY 40206
(800) 223-1839
(502) 895-2405
FAX (502) 895-1508
URL: http://www.aph.org

Descriptive Video Service, WGBH (DVS)
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134
(617) 492-2777 x 3490
URL: http://www.wgbh.org/dvs

Hadley School for the Blind
700 Elm Street
Winnetka, IL 60093
(800) 323-4238
(847) 446-8111
URL: http://www.hadley-school.org

Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults
111 Middle Neck Road
Sands Point, NY 11050
(516) 944-8900
TDD (516) 944-8637
FAX (516) 944-7302
URL: http://www.helenkeller.org

National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired (NAPVI)
PO Box 317
Watertown, MA 02272-0317
(800) 562-6265
(617) 972-7441
URL: http://www.napvi.org

National Federation of the Blind (NFB)
National Organization of Parents of Blind Children
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
(410) 659-9314
URL: http://www.nfb.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)
Library of Congress
1291 Taylor Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20542
(800) 424-8567
(202) 707-5100
URL: http://lcweb.loc.gov/nls/html

Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. (RFB&D)
20 Roszel Road
Princeton, NJ 08540
(800) 221-4791
(609) 451-0606
FAX (609) 987-8116
URL: http://www.rfbd.org

In the space below, write in the names and contact information for individuals in your state who can help you implement the National Agenda.

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